

Acton FinCom 1/11/05 Minutes

Members Present: Jonathan Chinitz, Pat Easterly, Pat Clifford, Bob Evans, Herman Kabakoff, Rheta Roeber, David Stone

Minutes of 12/14/04 approved.

Friends of Leary Field – Bill Mullin, Chairman of the 501 3c organization presented the rationale for the project and for utilization of CPA funds to install FieldTurf on the playing field at ABRHS. The major advantage is expanding the number of useable days from 60-70 per year to about 250. This will increase availability of the field for both school and community activities. In addition, it will improve safety and reduce watering and other maintenance requirements. Of the total \$750K cost, \$250K is to be raised from private sources, of which over \$200K is already in hand. The high school building project will contribute \$250K and the final \$250K is proposed to be provided from the CPA fund.

Bob Evans asked whether the track will need to be moved to make the field big enough for soccer. Bill Mullin said no. In response to a question, he added that utilization of the field will be governed by an inter-municipal agreement.

Pat Easterly asked how long the field will last. It's a relatively new product, so none of the installations have been in place for more than 10 years, but it is expected to last at least that long. Replacement of worn surface will also be much less expensive than the original installation, which includes the drainage system and synthetic earth under the playing surface.

Herman Kabakoff asked if there is data to support fewer injuries. Bill Mullin explained that the safety rationale is more intuitive. An uneven, muddy or icy surface is more likely to cause injuries than a smooth consistent surface. Herman said that he had read somewhere that some sports teams that had synthetic turf have converted back to grass. Dave Wilson, of Friends of Leary Field, said this refers to stadiums that had the older "carpet-over-concrete" product AstroTurf, which is not the same as FieldTurf.

Herman asked how voters should think about this project in the context of an expected operating override. Bill Mullin responded that neither the building project money nor CPA funds can be used for operating expenses. Moreover, his analysis indicates that the project has positive cash flow compared to the cost of maintaining grass on the field.

Pat Clifford asked about the expected impact of the project on overall recreation programs in Acton. Will adding this field lead to a need to add others? Bill Mullin said that he believes the increased availability of the field will relieve pressure on the use of this field and others in town.

David Stone said that he is impressed by the fact that one third of the dollars are coming from private donations. This sets a high standard for other CPA projects, in terms of showing leverage of the tax dollars and support from the community.

Rheta Roeber asked what will happen if the project comes in over the \$750K projected budget. Bill Mullin explained that the CPA funds and high school building project moneys are fixed, so any overage will have to be made up from the private donations. If the main project comes in under budget, there are other improvements, such as a walkway to the parking area that might be added.

Jonathan Chinitz said that the “will of the people” is strongly evident in supporting this project. The number of contributors probably exceeds the number of people who attend Town Meeting. One of the things the Finance Committee has emphasized this year is the need to maintain capital assets, of which Leary Field is an example.

The Committee voted 5-0-1 to support the project.

Committee Reports

ALG – Jonathan Chinitz – Both the selectmen and school committees are moving ahead with two override numbers, \$3.8M and \$4.5M, with the incremental \$700K being described as capital. Jonathan conveyed the Finance Committees view that both amounts should comprise a mix of operating and capital items. The other debate is over whether the override election should occur before town meeting, or after as recommended by FinCom in the event of a pyramid override.

Pat Clifford asked when the vote would take place. Jonathan Chinitz explained that the selectmen usually try to put the election as close to town meeting as possible, so either the week before or the week after.

Herman Kabakoff noted that there was also some discussion, based on the ALG minutes, of putting a lower number onto the ballot in addition to the \$3.8M and 4.5M. Jonathan Chinitz responded that the superintendent was conflicted over whether to offer a lower number. At least there is a program plan associated with the \$3.8M. He regrets that every year we get caught up in the current year’s budget and don’t take a multi-year view of what each level of funding will support. David Stone noted that the \$3.8M number represents the maximum amount that the Acton 20/20 meetings thought the voters might pass, and that the budgets were prepared against that.

BOS – Herman Kabakoff – One of the most interesting issues was the Martin Street parking/sidewalk situation. The selectmen voted to raise the priority of sidewalks in the South Acton neighborhood. Unsurprisingly, there was also extensive discussion of the budgets.

School Building Projects – Bob Evans – Work on the HVAC systems will continue in the spring, to make sure that the units that are heating now will be cooling then. There will be

an open house on MLK day. To all intents and purposes, the project is done and 90-95% of the punch list is done.

School Committees – Pat Easterly – Pat forwarded notes from the last two meetings, which she highlighted for the committee. There was not a lot of detailed discussion of the budget, which will be covered at the upcoming budget workshop. There was a discussion of looking at admitting 50 choice students at the high school level in order to fund additional staff. She would like to present an analysis of this to FinCom after she has had a chance to review her spreadsheet with the school administration.

Life After NESWC – David Stone – At a meeting later this week, the LAN committee will be discussing an analysis from town staff for continued operation of the transfer station after the current contract expires and through the transition to a permanent solution. We should begin to have a lot more information on alternatives as responses come in to the Requests for Proposals (RFPs).

Public Safety – Jonathan Chinitz – The public safety building committee has not met since our last meeting. However, he has received an update on the project by e-mail. There has been a minor delay related to the dispatch center.

Old Business

Capital Planning – Jonathan Chinitz has met with representatives from the various boards to try to get the capital planning process moving again.

School and Municipal Budget Sessions

Jonathan Chinitz has asked that FinCom receive electronically all of the information we need to prepare for these sessions.